

## **Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team 2002 Winter Meeting in the Bahamas**

### **Background**

The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team's (RT) recent efforts to develop cooperative relationships for Kirtland's warbler conservation in the Bahamas began in 1996. Mr. David Lee with the North Carolina State Museum, through his participation with the Society for Caribbean Ornithology, had many conservation contacts in the Bahamas. Lee and colleagues observed a Kirtland's warbler on Grand Bahama and became concerned about potential threats to its wintering grounds. He contacted the RT to seek support and funding. Although the RT had no funding for his proposal, two team members, Mike DeCapita, USFWS, and Phil Huber, US Forest Service (USFS), traveled to Grand Bahama in February 1997 to examine winter habitat and discuss Kirtland's warbler issues with Bahamians. Contacts were established with the Bahamas Ministry of Agriculture and the Bahamas National Trust (BNT).

As a result of those contacts, and through the assistance of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), four Bahamians traveled to Michigan in June, 1997. The Bahamas group included Mr. Eric Carey, Bahamas Ministry of Agriculture, and BNT representatives. They viewed Kirtland's warbler research and management activities on the breeding grounds. In February, 1998, selected RT members, including DeCapita, Huber, and Mr. Jerry Weinrich, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, traveled to Nassau and Grand Bahama. They were joined by TNC representatives and Mr. Dave Lee. During that trip, the group met with the Bahamas Minister of Agriculture, the Director of Agriculture, and BNT officials.

The RT became international in early 2000 when Mr. Carey was appointed a member by FWS Regional Director Bill Hartwig. In short order, Mr. Carey invited the RT to hold its winter, 2002, meeting in Nassau and the Team accepted. The attached trip report provides a brief annotated daily itinerary for the February 25-26, 2002 meeting and subsequent field trip to Andros.

In a related event, Mr. Carey, The Nature Conservancy and The U.S. Forest Service developed a neotropical bird research proposal for the Bahamas. The study is not solely for Kirtland's warbler, but includes survey and winter habitat characterization for the species. Initial survey work began in winter 2001-2002 on Andros. The observation of 8 Kirtland's warblers on Eleuthera, 6 of which were banded by Dr. Joe Wunderle, USFS, has resulted in a shift of the field study to Eleuthera for 2002-2003. A stated objective of the project is the training of Bahamians as field biologists, with the ultimate goal of providing local expertise to support official conservation efforts.

The February 25 - March 1, 2002 Team trip itinerary follows.

**Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team  
Winter Meeting**

**February 25 and 26, 2002; Bahamas National Trust, Nassau, Bahamas  
Field Habitat and Research Review, February 27 through March 1, 2002, Andros,  
Bahamas**

**Personnel**

Team Members

Mr. Kenneth R. Ennis, Team Leader, U.S. Forest Service, Cadillac, MI  
Mr. Philip Huber, U. S. Forest Service, Mio, MI  
Dr. Carol Bocetti, U.S. Geological Survey, Patuxent WRC, Pittsburgh, PA  
Dr. Patrick Lederle, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Lansing, MI  
Mr. Jerry Weinrich, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Roscommon, MI  
Mr. Michael Tansy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Seney, MI  
Mr. Michael DeCapita, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, East Lansing, MI  
Mr. Eric Carey, Bahamas Department of Agriculture, Nassau, Bahamas

Assoc. Team Member

Mr. Gregory Huntington, Michigan Department of Military Affairs, Lansing, MI

Kirtland's Warbler Volunteers

Dr. Nancy Bischoff, Perry, MI  
Dr. James Bull, Detroit Audubon Society  
Mr. Dave Mendus, Wyandotte, MI

**Itinerary and Activities**

***Sunday, February 24, 2002***

Travel from U.S. to Nassau; informal dinner meeting with Recovery Team and Associate Members.

***Monday, February 25, 2002***

8:30 am, Visit to U.S. Embassy to confer with Scott Turner, Economics and Environmental Affairs desk officer.

9:30 am, Visit to the office of Mr. Pericles Mailus, past President, Bahamas National Trust and well-known supporter of conservation activities in The Bahamas.

10:00 am, Tour of Bahamas National Trust office and The Retreat botanical garden, Nassau; presentations (Fig. 1) by:

Mr. Christopher Russell, Forestry Officer, Bahamas Department of Lands and Survey, described status of forest land and management challenges in the Bahamas.

Ms. Lynn Gape, Public Relations and Education Officer, Bahamas National Trust, described role of Bahamas National Trust in conservation.

Mr. Eric Carey, Bahamas Department of Agriculture and Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team Member, current status of natural resources conservation and management challenges in the Bahamas.

1:00—5:00 pm, Recovery Team meeting at Bahamas National Trust (Fig. 2) (agenda attached).

In addition to Recovery Team members and associates, the afternoon meeting was attended by, Mr. Colin Higgs, Permanent Secretary, Bahamas Ministry of Agriculture; Dr. Ethan Freid, Botanist, College of the Bahamas, and Mr. Paul Dean, local birding expert, Nassau.

Evening, Dinner and Social at Mr. Pericles Mailus residence.

***Tuesday, February 26, 2002***

8:30 am—12 noon, Recovery Team meeting concluded.

2:00 pm, Group traveled to Andros Town, Andros.

***Wednesday, February 27, 2002***

7:00 am—11:00 am, Birding field trip, including search for Kirtland's warbler (Fig. 3).

Met with U.S. Forest Service research team, Project Manager Mr. Matt Anderson, and field assistants and College of the Bahamas students Anseleno Davis and Jasmine Turner. Met Mr. Peter Douglas, chairman of ANCAT (Andros Conservancy and Trust).

***Thursday, February 28, 2002***

06:30 am—5:00 pm, Birding field trip and additional searching for Kirtland's warbler at several sites. Joined by Ms. Carolyn Wardle of Nassau, volunteer with Bahamas National Trust, Mr. David Wege, Bird Conservation International, Cambridge, UK, and Mr. Paul Dean, local birding expert, Nassau. Began visitation of Forest Service project study sites.

Six habitat types are being considered in the study:

1. Caribbean pine with Metopium (poisonwood) and Palmetto understory. This area was relatively easy to walk through, most of the poisonwood was not more than two meters high at the time, but berries were visible on most of the plants.
2. Pine with 2-3 meter coppice understory. This was one of the more difficult habitats to walk through. This is the habitat in which Jasmine Turner reported seeing a Kirtland's warbler.
3. Pine with less than 1 meter bracken fern understory. This habitat is only found in isolated patches. Most of these habitats had been recently burned and the bracken and chimney briar were the first plants to grow back.
4. Shrubby (old) field habitat. Part of an abandoned agricultural development. Mostly grasses, scattered fruit trees, and other shrubs.

5. Tall Coppice. This was comprised of tall (predominately > 3 m high) coppice with a maiden hair fern ground cover. This is the habitat type where Matthew Anderson and Leno Davis observed a Kirtland's warbler. The Recovery Team visited the site several days after the first observation but did not observe any Kirtland's.

6. Short coppice. All coppice from two to three m high. Team Member Carol Bocetti accompanied the research team while doing point counts in this habitat type.

In the afternoon, additional habitat types not in the study were visited, including mangrove flats, shoreline, and shoreline tidal flats. A pair of piping plovers (unbanded) was observed on an exposed tidal flat near the Forfar Field Station.

***Friday, March 1, 2002***

06:30 am—5:00 pm, Same activities as Thursday, February 28. Ennis, Huber, Weinrich, and Huntington departed for U.S. mid-morning.

***Saturday, 2 March 2002***

8:00 am, Remaining group departed Andros for U.S.

## **Followup to the Bahamas meeting**

Mr. Anseleno Davis (Fig. 4) of Nassau served as a field assistant for the winter 2001-2002 Bahamas-TNC-USFS field study mentioned in the Background section. Mr. Carey requested that the Team support a summer internship for Mr. Davis with the Huron-Manistee National Forest in Michigan during summer, 2002. The FWS East Lansing Field Office supported this effort with funding provided by the Division of International Conservation. Mr. Davis arrived in Michigan June 7, 2002 and departed August 31, 2002. He received a very comprehensive exposure to multi agency conservation efforts in Michigan. His Michigan experience included:

- participated in Kirtland's warbler census on Huron-Manistee NF,
- assisted with USFS Kirtland's warbler public tour,
- attended and gave a presentation at the KW Recovery Team summer meeting,
- assisted with USFS Kirtland's warbler habitat management (reforestation),
- assisted with USFS timber sale management,
- participated in wildlife and plant surveys and studies, including USFS wood turtle telemetry project and Michigan Dept of Military Affairs eastern massasauga rattlesnake surveys at Camp Grayling,
- visited Seney NWR and Hiawatha NF in Michigan Upper Peninsula,
- accompanied Michigan DNR endangered species program manager Dr. Pat Lederle with 2 day field review of piping plover recovery efforts, and
- visited Central Michigan and Michigan State Universities with Dr. Dave Ewert of The Nature Conservancy.

Mr. Davis will resume work as a field assistant for the continuation of the Bahamas study in 2002-2003. The Team and research project leaders will assist Mr. Davis with additional college training in the U.S. if he wishes to pursue that course.

The Team supports additional future internships in the U.S. by Bahamian students if circumstances and funding permit.

## Figures



**Figure 1.** Recovery Team receives presentation from Mr. Chris Russell and Mr. Eric Carey at BNT in Nassau.



**Figure 2.** Recovery Team meets at Bahamas National Trust, Nassau.

**Figures - cont.**



**Figure 3.** Recovery Team searches for birds in Caribbean pine forest, Andros.



**Figure 4.** Mr. Anseleno "Leno" Davis.

## Recovery Team Meeting Agenda



### Winter 2002 Agenda Items Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team Meeting

February 25-26, 2002  
Bahamas

#### Monday, February 25, 2002

8:30 A. M. Bahamas Introduction – Eric Carey

- Bahamas Department of Agriculture
- U. S. Embassy Presentation
- Bahamas Forestry, Vegetation and Landscapes

#### Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team Meeting

1:00 P.M. Meeting Called to Order

- Introductions
- Team Member Attendance
- Research Reports
  - A Research and Training Program for Conservation of Wintering Kirtland's Warbler and Associated Species in the Bahamas, J. Wunderle, Jr. (Carey)
  - Use of Stable Isotope Signatures to Identify KW Wintering Habitat, Dr. Stuart Bearhop and Dr. Geoff M. Hilton (Bocetti)
  - Update on Genetic Analysis, Dr. George Barrowclough (Bocetti)
  - Update Current Status of Research Publications
  - Other Research Reports
- Research Committee Report
  - Michigan State University Proposal
- Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Plan Revision
  - Recovery Goal Criteria
  - Recovery Plan
- Development of new management units
- Status of the Kirtland's Warbler Habitat Management Plan, Michigan DNR & Forest Service, (Huber-Weinrich)
- Kirtland's Warbler Habitat Management Activities
- Agency Reports for 2001 Accomplishments and 2002 Planned
  - Michigan Department of Natural Resources
  - USDA Forest Service
  - USDI Fish and Wildlife Service
  - Department of Military Affairs
  - Upper Peninsula of Michigan (Hiawatha NF, MDNR, County)
  - Bahamas

5:00 P.M. Adjourn

#### Tuesday, February 26, 2002

8:30 A.M.

- Information and Education Report
- Kirtland's Warbler Festival
- Photography
- Optics for the Tropics
- Cowbird Report, DeCapita
- 2002 Kirtland's Warbler Census, Weinrich (MDNR)
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant Opportunities

12:00 P. M. Adjourn

Afternoon, Travel to Andros; field review Feb 27 -Mar. 1.